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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6255
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1680
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1295
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7585
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3335
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 1748
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7904

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [PK](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: BHARAT BALLOT 09: DIVIDED LOYALTIES IN PEACEFUL
JAMMU AND KASHMIR NATIONAL POLLS

REF: NEW DELHI 749

Classified By: Classified by PolCouns Ted Osius for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶11. (SBU) Summary. National elections came off with very few problems in Jammu and Kashmir, one of seventeen states where voting occurred in the first phase. The most striking aspect of Jammu and Kashmir's election campaign was its ordinariness: voters focused on governance, roads, electricity and water, as well as religion and caste - just like in the rest of India. The absence of the "Kashmir issue" from the election campaign in Jammu and Kashmir today is remarkable. While security remains a key concern, the Kashmir electorate appears to be fed up with militancy and yearning for peace, normalcy and the chance for its own leaders (rather than Delhi) to address its many challenges. Violence is always a possibility in Jammu and Kashmir, especially during the seasonal increase in infiltration across the Line of Control. But the peaceful election in Jammu and Kashmir, with participation by former separatists, is an important step toward normalcy. The elections were not all that was on our interlocutors' minds: they lamented instability in Pakistan, but also expressed support for a return to Confidence Building Measures. They also urged the U.S. to pressure the Pakistani government on terrorism, and called for more educational opportunities for Kashmiris. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) PolCouns and Senior POL LES visited Jammu and Kashmir April 14-16, the eve and morning of the first phase of balloting for Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) elections. They met leaders of all major political parties, including Dr. Farooq Abdullah (National Conference - NC), Mehbooba Mufti (People's Democratic Party -- PDP), Indian Minister and state Congress Party chief Dr. Saifuddin Soz (Congress) and Chaman Lal Gupta (Bharatiya Janata Party - BJP). They also met Director General of Police Kuldeep Khoda, Separatist Leaders Bilal Lone and Yasin Malik, Political Adviser to the Chief Minister Devender Singh Rana, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Akbar Lone, Minister for Water and Irrigation Taj Mohiuddin, and business leaders Ashfaq Trumboo and Altaf Bukhari.

Peaceful Elections, Moderate Turnout

¶13. (SBU) Peaceful voting in Jammu and Kashmir took place

April 16 in the Jammu constituency with a 48 percent turnout (up from 44 percent in 2004). Party leaders said the turnout would have been higher if it were not for voter fatigue: State Assembly elections were held in seven rounds in December, with turnout nearing 65 percent. In Jammu, the main contest is between incumbent Congress Party Member of Parliament Madan Lal Sharma and BJP challenger Leela Karan Sharma, with the PDP candidate given little chance of success.

¶4. (SBU) The Jammu parliamentary seat is the first of six Lok Sabha seats at stake in Jammu and Kashmir. Balloting for the remaining five seats will take place in four other additional phases during the April and May. Running as coalition partners, Congress and the National Conference are each contesting three seats; BJP is contesting two, and PDP all six. Congress appears to have the edge in Jammu and Ladakh; BJP is expected to win in Udhampur; National Conference has the upper hand in Srinagar; and PDP is likely to win in Anantnag. Baramulla constituency, in the Kashmir valley, is a particularly competitive three-way race, with former separatist leader Sajjad Lone running against NC and PDP candidates. Lone's decision to seek elective office has unnerved All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leaders, who feel marginalized and irrelevant and whose call to boycott the state assembly elections in November-December backfired badly. This time, for the first time in 13 years, most APHC leaders have not called for a boycott of the elections. Only one APHC faction, led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani, has called on voters to boycott. United Jihad Council leader Syed Salahudin threatened Sajjad Lone's life for contesting the elections. At every opportunity, Embassy officials urged police and government leaders to provide Lone with maximum security during the campaign.

¶5. (SBU) As with many Lok Sabha contests in Bharat Ballot 09, history's largest ever democratic exercise, personalities and local politics play a very prominent role. NC President Farooq Abdullah, son of a previous Chief Minister, father of the current one, Omar, and himself a former Chief Minister, is seeking a Lok Sabha seat from his home base of Srinagar. Abdullah won two state legislative assembly seats in December, a Rajya Sabha (upper house of parliament) seat a few months later and, as he quipped to us, a seat on the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Board, making him "eligible for an entry in the Guinness Book of World Records" for the most election campaigns in a six-month period. Opponents cite his candidacy as evidence of NC's weak bench and inability to bring in new blood.

¶6. (SBU) Both Abdullahs -- father and son -- have campaigned on promises of development, advertising their commitment to road construction, electrical and water projects. As is often the case in India, voters decide whom to support based on caste and religion. Most striking in today's Jammu and Kashmir balloting is the absence of "the Kashmir problem" as an election issue. While security remains a key concern, the Kashmir electorate appears to be fed up with militancy and yearning for peace, normalcy and the chance for its own leaders (rather than Delhi) to address its many challenges.

Security Worries

¶7. (C) Recent increased infiltration has heightened security concerns for all of Jammu and Kashmir's leaders. Director General of Police Kuldeep Khoda confirmed reftel reports of nearly 100 infiltrators in the past six weeks, two-thirds of whom have been "neutralized" with one-third still at large. According to Khoda, the use of night vision devices, GPS, maps and compass by militants indicates the high quality of military training being accorded to these infiltrators. Khoda assessed that the terrorists aim to do more than create disturbances at election time; theirs is a bigger, longer-term plan, with the final goal of striking high-visibility targets and destabilizing the Indian state.

¶8. (SBU) Our interlocutors expressed despair about Pakistani

instability, which they attributed to weak governance. Not only the separatists, but also party leaders expressed nostalgia for General Pervez Musharraf, whom they saw as a reliable interlocutor, one in whose tenure much had been achieved on the restoration of peace in the valley. They regretted that progress made in the Composite Dialogue prior to Musharraf's downfall had not led to a settlement. All party leaders expressed hope that dialogue would resume following India's elections. They stressed the critical role of the U.S. in "fixing" Pakistan's problems, destroying Pakistan-based terror infrastructure, pressuring the militants and uprooting the Taliban. They also expressed hope that the U.S. would "help Jammu and Kashmir open up" by increasing educational opportunities for Kashmiris.

Confidence-Building Measures

¶ 9. (SBU) Mehbooba Mufti stressed her party's concern that, if progress could not be made in the Indo-Pak dialogue, Kashmiri extremists would be emboldened. She outlined the PDP's vision of a Kashmir freely trading not only with Pakistan, but also with the nations of Central Asia. Her vision of "self-rule" for Kashmir involves a Joint Council - sort of a House of Elders - with members from both sides of the Line of Control, carrying out joint projects, establishing joint policies, and managing the inevitable natural disasters that beset Jammu and Kashmir. The status quo cannot be maintained, she stressed, emphasizing her support for Confidence-building measure such as:

- a. Release of prisoners;
- b. Stopping harassment based on the Public Safety Act (PSA);
- c. Repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act;
- d. Punishing security forces involved in Human Rights violations;
- e. Relocation of security forces camps from private properties;
- f. Stopping the random search of houses, buses and cars;
- g. Lowering the visibility of security forces;
- h. Giving the State Human Rights Commission more teeth;
- i. Stopping the harassment of released/surrendered militants;
- j. Permitting Panchayat (village) elections;
- k. Providing travel documents to moderate separatist leaders;
- l. Facilitating travel between the two sides of Kashmir;
- m. Opening communications between the two Kashmirs;
- n. Restarting dialogue between Delhi and Srinagar; and
- o. Emphasizing economic development measures.

¶ 10. (SBU) On the matter of Panchayat (village) elections, the Chief Minister's Political Adviser said that, if parliamentary elections continue to go smoothly, Omar Abdullah will launch Panchayat elections.

¶ 11. (SBU) Other major parties and even separatist leaders also indicated their support for CBMs, in contrast to earlier occasions when they rejected interim steps, fearing they would delay a final solution to the Kashmir problem. All agreed that, if a stable government is formed in Delhi in June, that would be the best time to nudge it in the direction of adopting key CBMs and reopening dialogue with Islamabad. On the other hand, if a peace process cannot be relaunched, there is the danger that Jammu and Kashmir will return to its old, violent ways.

¶ 12. (SBU) Comment: The unfolding of successful state and parliamentary elections, the smooth transition of the state government from one coalition to another, and the issues driving people to the polls suggests that Jammu and Kashmir is steadily becoming just like any other Indian state. What PolCouns heard from his interlocutors across the political spectrum was the same he has heard everywhere else in India - people are talking about governance (roads, water, electricity, delivery of health and education service), corruption, and caste and religion configurations. The only difference in Kashmir was the unanimity with which Kashmiris stressed the need for the GOI to make some CBM gestures.

Even gradual and low hanging CBMs would elicit a strong and positive response from Kashmiris. End Comment.

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